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### Art's asymptotic leadership

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## **Art's asymptotic leadership: Arts leadership, education and the loss of autonomy**

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### **Abstract**

This article will mostly engage with arts leadership through a discussion that focuses on the arts, leadership and education, and how their convergence might have a direct impact on autonomy. Taking a meta-theoretical approach, the main argument is that arts leadership is an *asymptotic* state of affairs. Rather than pose art and leadership as antithetical events that necessitate forms of syntheses through identifiable contexts, the context for arts leadership represents a contiguous space where *art* and *leadership* continuously seek a mutual way of preserving their integrity in an asymptotic relationship. If this relationship turns into a synthesis, both art's autonomy and the ability to lead creatively are neutralized. The aim is to question the various implications that bring together the autonomous spheres of the arts, education and leadership, while inviting the reader to draw his or her own conclusions critically and autonomously. To clarify this approach, this article straddles across several horizons, including: arts practice as a sphere of autonomous dispositions and the political implications that follow; education as a horizon that *educes* - leads out - through the *pedagogical exits* that are offered by the arts; and art's anti-systemic pedagogy, where art's autonomy becomes a possibility of unlearning systems.

**Keywords:** autonomy, heteronomy, art, leadership, asymptote, dialectic

It is the term *nomos* that gives full meaning to the term and project of *autonomy*. To be autonomous, for an individual or collectivity, does not signify doing ‘what one likes’ or whatever pleases one at the moment, but rather *giving oneself one’s own law*. At this point, two questions arise:

- What, for a being, does being autonomous [...] signify? [...]
- If we make our laws, can we (and ought we) to make just any laws whatsoever?

These questions can be condensed into one: Is there a nature of law and a law of nature - a *phusis* of *nomos* and a *nomos* of *phusis*? (Castoriadis 1997: 332, original emphasis)

## **Introduction**

Although our dispositions to *do art* and to *lead* are often encountered across junctures where, broadly speaking, acts of creativity and autonomy converge, *arts leadership* could well result in a form of domestication where the arts become ‘effective instruments’ that fulfil a heteronomous condition that makes it subject to matters that are external to itself.

Bearing in mind that we lay claim to autonomy *through* art and leadership as avenues that often converge on common horizons, the possibilities sought in arts leadership also need to protect the autonomy that they portend. Far from a simple crossing between arts-making and creative organizational practices, arts leadership is firmly ensconced in a

political sphere for which we have to take responsibility. The politics of arts leadership bears a direct effect on how a democracy - as a form of associated living (Dewey 1966) - could sustain the tangible sense of integrity by which art and leadership are exercised and defined. This further implies that arts leadership belongs to matters of democracy and social justice as much as it often appears to be limited to policy-making, management, or anything to do with organizational and institutional settings.

Taking a meta-theoretical approach, this article's central argument is that arts leadership is an *asymptotic* state of affairs. This means that rather than pose art and leadership as antithetical events that necessitate forms of syntheses through identifiable contexts, any context for arts leadership represents a contiguous space where *art* and *leadership* continuously seek a mutual way of preserving their integrity in an asymptotic relationship. Here I am arguing that once this relationship turns into a synthesis, both art's autonomy and the ability to lead creatively are neutralized.

In line with analyses of autonomy and productivism in arts practice and pedagogical aesthetics that I have discussed elsewhere (Baldacchino 2009a, 2012a, 2012b, 2013a), I have taken the conscious decision not to approach arts leadership from standard literature on leadership, organizational and entrepreneurial studies. Instead, this article will mostly engage with arts leadership through a discussion that focuses on the arts, leadership and education, and how their convergence might have a direct impact on autonomy.

To do this, I am engaging with elements of political philosophy (Arrighi et al. 1989; Castoriadis 1991, 1997; Mouffe 2005, 2009), arts practice, aesthetics and critical theory (Adorno et al. 2002; Rancière 2006, 2009; Rose 1992), and philosophy of education (Greene 1978, 1988; Dewey 1966). The aim is to question the various implications that

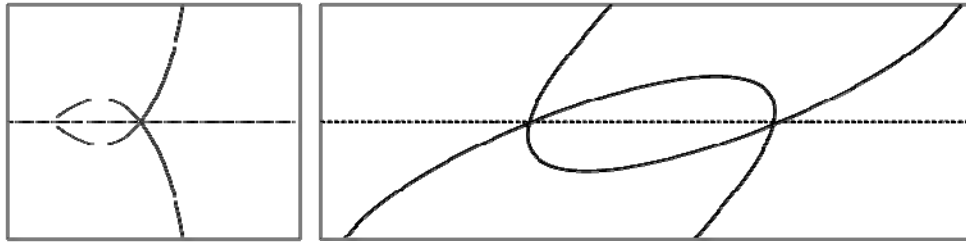
bring together the autonomous spheres of the arts, education and leadership, while inviting the reader to draw his or her own conclusions critically and autonomously.

By way of clarifying this approach, this article straddles across several horizons, including: arts practice as a sphere of autonomous dispositions and the political implications that follow; education as a horizon that *educes* - leads out - through the pedagogical exits that are offered by the arts; and art's anti-systemic pedagogy, where art's autonomy becomes a possibility of unlearning systems.

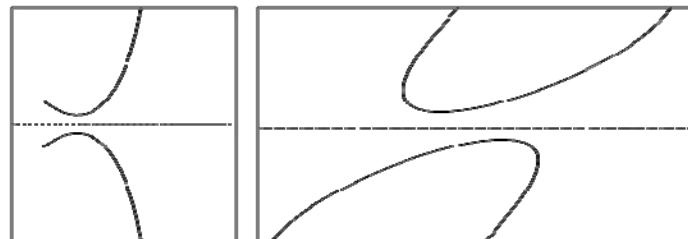
### **Asymptotes**

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines an asymptote as 'a straight line that continually approaches a given curve but does not meet it at any finite distance'. Thus we can think of curves that grow in a similar manner but remain asymptotically related in that they share one asymptote while they are never dialectically synthesized.

Here, the reference to an asymptotic relation is mostly diagrammatic. It is by no means mathematical. Neither is it intended to plot the relationship between measured functions of art and leadership on a graph or through visualization. By means of an analogy of two curves in an asymptotic relationship I want to illustrate (1) the autonomous force by which the arts and leadership shape themselves and (2) the space that they come to occupy. This diagrammatic representation (see Figures 1 and 2) also accentuates the likeness by which the arts and leadership (as curves) have with the *line* (the asymptote) that they run *against* and even *share*.



**Figure 1:** *Synthesis*: this illustrates a dialectical disposition where two antithetical states of affairs (represented by the curves) interact across and against each other to produce a synthesis. This is represented by the space created by the overlapping curves and which is cut across by the dotted line.



**Figure 2:** *Asymptote*: unlike a dialectical exchange where antithetical situations are mutually attracted by their contradictory positioning, an asymptotic attraction is equalized by mutual tension (as illustrated). Here the asymptote is illustrated by the dotted line that instead of being absorbed by a synthetic space it proscribes synthesis. In an asymptotic relationship contradictory states of affairs do not create a resolved synthesis. Figure 2 qualifies the space that is crossed and signified by the asymptote as a possible state of affairs that holds the contradictory states apart. One can imagine how the

two curves represent art's autonomous character and forms of heteronomous leadership, while contexts such as education and culture come about within the asymptotic space that locates the many questions that are discussed in this article.

The tensorial relationship created by the space across which the asymptote is drawn may be considered as a *contiguous* accident where one might articulate a state of suspended contingency that preserves the curves' autonomous disposition. This space is contingent to the way these autonomous dispositions emerge and relate to each other by further contexts that they are equally disposed to reject.

### **Ambiguous instruments**

Unavoidably, the ambiguities by which the arts are used as instrumental means of leadership would sustain, by intent *or* implication, an array of ideological objectives. More so, as an assumption of creativity and innovation, arts leadership remains volatile in terms of how art, in its distinctly autonomous disposition, could merge effectively with a disposition for leadership that portends a heteronomous function.

While I do not wish to imply that *all* forms of leadership take a heteronomous function, there are identifiable contexts where leadership explicitly takes such a role. For example, in the so-called knowledge and culture industries - which, roughly, have come to denote market-oriented articulations of education on one hand, and the arts and culture on the other - the human need to poeticize and to lead are often represented as being somewhat coterminous in method and tenor. In this respect, arts leadership is expediently

assumed as a state of affairs by which the arts would gain legitimacy as they increasingly qualify as effective enablers of leadership and managerial skills. Yet, while it appears benign enough for institutions to appropriate the opportunities that such a relationship invariably presents, as a koine (i.e. as an expression held in common between *doing* and *leading*) arts leadership is both ambiguous and volatile, especially when it inhabits a political space.

Here one can appreciate the dilemma of arts leadership and the choices that need to be made so that art's autonomy moves and shapes leadership, rather than the other way round where heteronomous forms of leadership will use the arts and consequently suppress their autonomous disposition. However, this must be considered with some care. Just as leadership begets the force of an ability to lead others autonomously (and here I do not mean the-artist-as-leader but art's autonomous ability to lead), I would regard the arts as forms of critical practice in whose autonomy they defy any polity that sees arts practice as an instrument. This is where art's desire to lead autonomously must not be confused with leadership as a conceptualized practice of heteronomous measure and attainment.

The arts articulate leadership by dint of what they are and not by what they want to do or achieve. Furthermore the arts reject measure by their ontological implication, whereas when arts leadership often appears on the horizons of academia or the culture industry, it is iterated against a number of objectives that are already set. When creativity is legitimized within such contexts, it is often seen as a method in whose innovative and non-linear approaches it is expected to provide alternative or lateral ways of operating.



By its very definition arts leadership implies a series of functions that are described and presented as being ‘creative’. Yet for this creativity to gain legitimacy within industry, society, or in service provisions like health care and the school, it is made to fulfil an instrumental purpose. This poses an aprioristic condition on arts leadership where it becomes predisposed to heteronomous conditions, which, as we have seen above, in terms of arts practice, remain alien in both form and expectation.

An instrumental argument for arts leadership implicitly negates any possible rift or disruption between the arts in their autonomous nature and the implicitly heteronomous expression of leadership in its functional objectives. Somehow this also distorts the autonomous potentials of arts leadership as found in the contribution that the arts give when leading in innovation. However, as I will argue later on in this article, art’s creative leadership needs to be considered with some care and the context needs to be specified.

### **Familiar consequences**

The consequences of this condition are well known. Arts institutions are now increasingly expected to provide managerial and entrepreneurial avenues for arts and non-arts audiences (or ‘client bases’) alike. This prompts the need to contextualize this kind of articulation in a very different way from just ‘applying’ the arts to managerial contexts. If we are to speak of forms of leadership that are embedded in the arts, then we must articulate a logic that by its asymptotic nature begins to make sure that the contiguous space where the attractive-repulsive relationship between the disposition to do art and the disposition to lead creatively is enhanced in its paradoxical condition.

This leaves us in a dilemma. While historically the arts have taken many forms of leadership that were underpinned by art's autonomous nature, the cooption of the arts into managerial discourses and functions must be challenged, because arts leadership can only be asserted and defined by the tensional distinction that is gained within the space by which doing art and leading appear to be attracted to each other. On the other hand if we are to sustain the autonomous possibilities of women and men's poetic disposition as potential forms by which leadership and autonomy uphold a diversity of meanings, then we have to sustain this through paradox and aporia as forms of artistic, poetic and aesthetic engagement with the world.

It is broadly accepted that for centuries the arts have sustained the human ability to mediate between the immediacies of contingent existence and the realities of the ideational objectives that we set for ourselves. We do this in an effort to make sense of the same contingencies by which we live and which prompt us to do art in the first place. After all, we poeticize the world because we are often confronted by its mysteries. We do art because we are confronted by a sense of helplessness that we have to overcome: whether it is death or love, suffering or joy, desire or ambition.

Likewise, if one could speak of leadership as an identifiably externalized concept of artistic autonomy, this can only emerge from an asymptotic relationship with our urge to confront and live out the paradoxical and disruptive practices by which human beings do art as a way of asserting their right to be. I should clarify that rather than a mechanistic notion of being 'free' from any external constraints, this understanding of autonomy has to do with the notion of free and intelligent individuals.

### **The arts in an illiberal education**

Education is a form of leading. Leading comes from the *ago* in ped[*ago*]gy and an *agôn* that articulates continuous debates, disputes and relationships that include the pedagogical (Baldacchino 2012a, 2009b), the political (Mouffe 2005), the authorial and poetical (Rose 1992: 55; Greene 1978: 79).

In view of the pedagogical, political and poetical conditions that are here identified with arts leadership, it would be easily presumed that the *agôn* which articulates the relationship between the arts, leadership and education follows a dialectical logic where a heteronomous need for leadership emerges as the antithesis to the autonomy of arts practice. This would imply that such a contradictory state is followed by a synthesizing educational context whose aim is to enable the effective emergence of arts leadership as a new practice.

It seems reasonable to argue that within such a dialectical condition, education will take on a *consumptive* role, while the arts and leadership would function as the *production* and *distribution* of the tasks at hand (whatever they may be). However, to accept such a state of affairs would mean that as human dispositions that originally emerge from a desire to enhance and gain autonomy, such a pedagogical transformation of the arts and leadership must be subject to a heteronomous condition.

As an educational koine, arts leadership has profound implications that cannot be simply plotted on the economistic structures that have become prevalent in educational institutions. My objection to a dialectical perception of arts leadership (where education becomes a form of synthetic consumption) comes from a wider understanding of the educational implications of arts leadership that could be identified with a politics of

aesthetics, and more so the distributive assumptions that such a politics would imply (Rancière 2006). Rather than a synthesis I would regard education as a contiguous space within which the arts and leadership confront each in an asymptotic relationship.

We need to remind ourselves that, in an economistic model, educational expectations are firmly political where arts leadership is often strategized within an epistemological hierarchy of vested interests that dictates what we mean by needs, skills and achievements. This hegemonic structure implicates arts leadership with a meritocratic ideology where far from being a way of empowering those whose history has disadvantaged, meritocracy becomes an instrument of powerful political formations that have been known to select, use and distort the diverse narratives of autonomy begotten through freedom and intelligence (see Greene 1988). Perversely, merit becomes a way of selecting and judging those, who, deemed ‘unsuccessful’, are blamed for ‘not trying enough’ (see Baldacchino 2009b: 74–79). Meritocratic selection is often presented as a form of leadership within institutions whose viability is measured and planned against a structure of illiberal corporate power.

### **Spheres of autonomy**

We need to remind ourselves that for art to be art it must be: irreducible - which means that it cannot be explained in terms of other than art; and autonomous - where, as argued earlier, art is our form of affirmation of freedom and intelligence, rather than an instrument by which we negotiate freedom and intelligence.

Those who read the above as some kind of choice between a half-baked excuse for *art for art's sake* on one hand and a validation of art's pedagogical, social and political

*function* on the other miss the very point of art as a disposition whose historicity is begotten by its refusal to tag along with history.

Equally misleading are the usual arguments that distinguish between imitation and construction, with the latter relaying itself to another dispute by which art's *reality* is split between assumptions of autonomy on one hand and emancipation on the other. The snag is that on a closer look the contextualization of this dualism tends to confirm an approach to emancipation and autonomy that folds back on heteronomous forms of universalism.

This is particularly well discussed by Rancière (2009) when he shows how constructivist arguments for or against the aesthetic have reached a point where those who claimed back the aesthetic argument for art's autonomy found themselves impossibly pitted against those preoccupied with the risk of art's failure to mediate existence with reality. The argument was particularly heated because this mostly happened within a political and philosophical camp that travelled on the same political-aesthetic horizon (Adorno et al. 2002).

The toing and froing between aesthetics and artistic mediation repeatedly misplaces the argument for autonomy. However, it also confirms the political immanence of art. Unless we come to terms with this state of affairs, our approach to art - be it in leadership, in education or anywhere else - remains trapped by a multiplicity of unnecessary dualisms such as those between theory and practice, contemplation and action, research and practice... ad nauseam.

While artists, art critics, art educators, cultural leaders and others are engaged by demands that ultimately proscribe them from engaging with the arts politically, the critical vacuum that is left behind continues to grow. The wider this vacuum becomes, the

stronger the assumptions of legitimacy. This stronghold will ultimately stifle any hope for arts leadership to sustain an autonomous disposition.

### **The political economic retreat**

This is where the case for art's autonomy is itself turned on its head. Here we begin to witness a scenario where the asymptotic relationship of arts and leadership works against both of its constitutive aspects. In this scenario the stronger the claims by which art's autonomous qualities of creativity and the imagination are made, the easier the 'retreat in political economy' becomes. By retreat, here I mean a displacement of the arts into a marketplace that is shaped by the legitimizing claims that the arts are forced to make in order to retain a position that could attract enough political and financial support to survive... as an *industry*.

To discuss this I want to borrow an analogous scenario from Arrighi et al's (1989) discussion of the onset of political economy in the eighteenth and nineteenth century and the outcomes that it left on the politics of social class in the twentieth century. In their book *Anti-Systemic Movements* (1989), Arrighi et al. discuss how, following Adam Smith's definition of social class as a political economic outcome, the analysis of social conflict finds itself externalized in the marketplace and then the nation state. 'Smith took leave of the pin factory whose scenario opens *The Wealth of Nations* to follow the interplay of supply and demand in the market place, and of class interests in the national arena' (Arrighi et al. 1989: 6).

They go on to explain how Marx's critique of Smith's political economy begins with taking the opposite direction and instead of the market, Marx stays on the shop floor, and

instead of framing class interests by national interests, he moves his analysis to the ‘hidden abode of production’ (Arrighi et al. 1989: 10). Yet Arrighi et al. then go on to show how Marx himself begins to change route and, like Smith, take refuge in political economy.

In the case of Marx this retreat is most evident in his writings on the class struggle in France, in which class interests were defined in terms of a national political-economic space, and what goes on in the abode of production simply does not come into the picture at all. (Arrighi et al. 1989: 10)

Arrighi et al. explain that Marx makes his readers aware of how the national interest coopts the class struggle by revealing the asymptotic relationship that exists between the shop floor and the market - where a stronger shop floor sustains a stronger market that creates a stronger nation founded on stronger exploitation of those working on the shop floor. This meant that, ‘the farther the class struggle was from the projected asymptote, the more it would take on a political/national character. Even the proletariat, the class which in his view has neither country nor nationality, had first of all to wage a national struggle’ (Arrighi et al. 1989: 11).

Unless we consider where Arrighi et al. were heading with their critique of this ‘refuge into political economy’, their work will have no relevance to this analysis of art’s autonomy, except perhaps, if one were to regard artists as producers of a specific kind of labour under specific conditions (an argument that is often used in culture and creative industry literature). But Arrighi et al. move their discussion further. Through a discussion

of Max Weber they take their analysis into the blurred boundaries between social class and status groups, and then they draw their readers' attention to new forms of political discourses in the narratives of resistance. Such narratives begin to identify the formation of anti-systemic movements that articulated forms of autonomy situated beyond the conventional assumptions that were customarily made by the traditional Left. More so, these new formations began to defy the notion of a politics of 'block formations', which until then had been a major focus for political struggle.

It is in this new political disposition for autonomy that I want to refer us back to the argument for art's autonomy and how this begets an asymptotic relationship with leadership. The relevance to the arts is more than simply representational. Although anti-systemic movements in the 1960s and to some extent in the 1970s continued to take on a national character (here I have in mind riots in France and Czechoslovakia in the 1960s, and the rise of urban guerrilla in Italy and Germany in the 1970s), at the same time there was always an internationalist backdrop that re-emerged in the late 1980s and 1990s with radical Green movements, anti-Globalism and, more recently, the Occupy Movement.

Granted that the political imaginary of such movements retains a strong rooting in those artistic manifestations that are now received in legacy of a bygone era, returned to the younger generations as forms of nostalgia where John Lennon, Joan Baez, Jimi Hendrix and Bob Dylan have become the troubadours of an era that gave us the Peace Movement, marijuana and Che Guevara, beyond this representational context, politically speaking, the arts now find themselves at a serious cross roads.

Still suspended in the asymptotic state of affairs by which the same anti-systemic movements found themselves articulated, the aesthetic containment of politics is often



identified with the jovial and jocular attempts that continue to spread in the virtual world and in the squares of major metropolitan cities alike, where resistance turns the art of festival into a claim to liberation. In this respect, one could see how representation becomes a form of likeness. This might well fool us into thinking that a genuine dialectic is taking place between a poetics of resistance and a politics of change. In effect nothing of the sort is being fulfilled. More so, the narrative of resistance itself becomes a product sold on the markets of the culture and creative industry, where arts practitioners find themselves being coopted into the Establishment.

Evidently whichever way one looks at it, a political analysis of arts leadership leaves many questions open. How could this state of affairs begin to address the asymptotic nature of arts leadership, when the arts find themselves documented and presented as products within the knowledge and culture-creative industries? Could the 'refuge' taken into political economy by the political forefathers of the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries bear any effect on the lineage by which the anti-systemic movements that Arrighi, Hopkins and Wallerstein began to characterize the politics of resistance in the late 1980s, right before the collapse of the Berlin Wall? How much has the anti-systemic context of autonomous politics become itself a strategy for the marketization of the very same asymptotic relationship by which the arts originally defied the heteronomous structures that confronted them?

When knowledge and creativity leave their abode and go to market, where does arts leadership stand? Could we begin to explain this by trying to trace back such abodes? But are we in a situation where we can even look beyond the market itself and stare in the face of the abyss? What can we make of other anti-systemic forms of resistance that are

now attracting the young to fight wars that we thought were buried with the victims of so many genocides marked by religious, ethnic and ideological fanaticism?

More tangibly, how could one conceptualize this state of affairs with the uprisings and ensuing civil wars in Syria, Libya, Egypt, Afghanistan, Ukraine and Iraq as backdrops? Is there any parallelism between the anti-systemic representational forms of autonomy that emerged from the Vietnam War in the late 1960s and the conflicts that emerged after 9/11? Are the current forms of representational resistance irrelevant to what we have in mind when we speak of the arts as dispositions of autonomy? Where do they leave the politics of arts leadership vis-à-vis, on one hand, an irrational claim to Jihad and, on the other, an equally irrational claim to the fight for the ‘national interest’ in places that seem remote yet remain so near?

### **Art practice as a *generative* case for autonomy**

The questions posed by a political reflection on arts leadership keep returning onto the discussion of autonomy. However, as this discussion is partly triangulated on the arts, leadership and education, this calls for a closer look at arts practice in its *generative* articulation of knowledge as a form of enquiry.

Here I find Cornelius Castoriadis’s discussion of autonomy very relevant. In contextualizing autonomy from within the polis, Castoriadis effectively *opens* the operative parameters by which one could begin to assume the need to exercise what we mean by *autonomy* in terms of a societal and, to some extent, a democratic context. Politically speaking, autonomy is invariably contrasted to the condition of heteronomy as it is played through the relationship between individual, society and the law. ‘The denial

of the instituting dimension of society, the covering up of all the instituting imaginary by the instituted imaginary', says Castoriadis, 'goes hand in hand with the creation of true-to-form individuals, whose thought and life are dominated by repetition (whatever else they may do, they do very little), whose radical imagination is bridled to the utmost degree possible, and who are hardly truly individualized' (1991: 163).

As we have seen in the case of political economy, the state of affairs cited by Castoriadis is not that distant from the cooption of the arts by a market that has no concern for the exploitative conditions of the 'abode of production' as long as this is creative and innovative enough to sustain the instituted imaginary. Taken from an arts perspective, one could argue that the case for a *generative* approach to autonomy must happen through avenues that, if not entirely disrupt, must at the very least question the heteronomous conditions to which art's autonomy finds itself subjected (as discussed earlier in this article).

As Castoriadis puts it,

as a germ, autonomy emerges when explicit and unlimited interrogation explodes on the scene – and interrogation that has bearing not on 'facts' but on the social imaginary significations and the possible grounding. This is a moment of creation, and it ushers in a new type of society and a new type of individuals. I am speaking intentionally of *germ*, for autonomy, social as well as individual, is a *project*.  
(1991: 163, original emphasis)

This takes us to the central argument - or rather, *framing* - by which Castoriadis argues that,

autonomy does not consist in acting according to a law discovered in an immutable Reason and given once and for all. It is the unlimited self-questioning about the law and its foundations as well as the capacity, in light of this interrogation, *to make, to do*, and *to institute* (and therefore also, *to say*). Autonomy is the reflective activity of a reason creating itself in an endless movement, both as individual and social reason. (1991: 164, original emphasis)

If one were to argue that the autonomous allows us to interrogate by dint of *making, doing, instituting* and *saying*, it could mean that a case for arts leadership must be made as a relational condition that retains, asymptotically, the autonomous and therefore creative elements by which the arts would interrogate leadership itself. As I have argued elsewhere (Baldacchino 2012b, 2013a, 2014), to assert art's generative autonomy also means that the arts must always remain radically distanced from any attempt to gain legitimation for the arts by accepting them as 'enabling elements' within a curriculum or an institutional context. If we are to sustain the arts in a context that appears to be 'applied', this must be qualified by art's interruption of the instituting imaginary and heteronomous conditions by which schools, hospitals and other institutions are run.

Yet as one states this need for interruption, it cannot be confused with what is often attributed and factually studied as art's ability to instigate creativity and innovation through instituted means. The mushrooming of *creativity and innovation* studies that

claim to install a variety of forms of lateral and critical thinking in education (I cite and discuss this literature in Baldacchino 2013a), often betrays the real intention behind the excessive emphasis on representational and visual concepts, by which, we are told, we can become better administrators and policy-makers. Emergent disciplines like design thinking and research visualization are increasingly regarded as effective managerial skill sets. This is further legitimized by the social scientific claim that the arts could process data and articulate facts better than other forms of enquiry. However, inasmuch as this may be the case, these processes are often hijacked by a positivistic approach whereby arts practice is externalized and used as a tool for research.

While some would not regard this externalization as problematic, there is a distinction to be had between: arts practice regarded as enquiry - as an act of *doing-as-finding* that generates data in the process of making a case or posing a question; and arts practice as a form of self-externalization into a form of research that effectively *processes* data, as any other form of empirical procedure. The distinction might sound simple, but the implications are far more complex. Here we are speaking of how: art retains its claim to be irreducible and autonomous; and art is reduced into a research tool.

Only as a generative form - as *doing-as-finding* - could art be a 'germ', a form of autonomy that 'emerges when explicit and unlimited interrogation explodes on the scene' (Castoriadis 1991: 163). In this respect, one can see how the implication of arts leadership becomes more than clear, in that as a germ that interrogates the instituted imaginary, arts practice can only lead creatively if its articulation of the law - the *nomos* - is 'self-constitutive', and not constituted by or for other than what it does as art.

This brings us to the citation that opens this essay where Castoriadis wonders how there could ever be a nature of law and a law of nature, a '*phusis* of *nomos* and a *nomos* of *phusis*' (1997: 332). By electing the Aristotelian notion of *phusis* as having its own origin within itself, in contrast with Aristotle's other definition of *phusis* as nature serving as a teleological state of affairs and therefore reaching an end for other than itself, Castoriadis begins to bring together the notion of *nomos* with what *phusis* creatively articulates as self-generation.

Again, taking this political consideration into the artistic realms by which we assert a meaning of autonomy through an aesthetic imaginary that is deeply related to us as a *polis*, one could argue that to make a case for arts leadership would require us to consider the possibilities of self-constitution. While Castoriadis's context is slightly different, one could articulate an argument for this kind of autonomy in parallel with what he says about the *creative* - or as we are calling it here, *generative* - argument for autonomy. 'The living being self-constitutes itself; it is for itself; it creates *its* world. It is its own end, whether as individual, as species, an ecosystem, matters little [...] It creates, each time, a *proper world*' (Castoriadis 1997: 332, original emphasis).

### **Educed into a 'proper world': Ten reflections**

Just as, early on in this article, the word *pedagogy* prompted us to glean a notion of leadership from the *agôn* of politics, education and the arts, it is equally apt to garner a notion of leadership from education as *educere*, where education becomes a disposition that *educes* us - leads us out - into the world.

By dint of its autonomy, art practice not only sows the seed that germinates into an ability to interrogate the world through an imaginary that is all too aware of its instituting potentials. More importantly, art's autonomy continuously represents - throughout an entire history of art-making - the constant need to assert, narrate, free and often leave the polis that it forms part of. In terms of how the arts educe such a possibility, which is undoubtedly asserted by means of its paradoxical and aporetic nature, we can speak of art's way out as an exit pedagogical *project* (see Baldacchino 2012a). Like Castoriadis here one does not speak of a done deal or a preordained set of events aimed at reaching an objective or *telos*, but of a *project* where as a *germ* autonomy is both social and individual (1991: 163).

The world in which we exit is a *proper world*. It is *our own* world, in terms of what in French and Italian is referred to as *le propre* and *il proprio* - implying something that is *proper to* somewhere or someone with a degree of singularity and peculiarity. In English the word *proper* often loses its links with the act of appropriation - of making one's own. A universe of singularities distinctly marks out a proper world. Politically, this implies a democratic relationship that is agonistically plural and paradoxical (Mouffe 2009). As we approach this relationship from arts leadership's further layers of meanings and actions, to exit into a proper world is to claim one's right to exercise the plural and anti-systemic conditions by which art's project of autonomy entails a process of unlearning (see Baldacchino 2013b, 2013c, 2014).

By way of concluding this article and opening the discussion further, I want to identify and briefly comment on ten *theses* that trace the relationship between arts practice and enquiry, education and leadership. These should be read as nodes, or cross points on a

map that trace a possible topography of the agonistic terrains on which art and leadership enter in an asymptotic relationship.

The following should be read as thoughts that would help arts practitioners, educators, researchers and leaders facilitate an engagement with the processes of interruption that assert our right to art's autonomy.

- *Art's aim is to practice, not produce:* While we cannot ignore the abode of production in which human relations and the political self are nurtured, we must distinguish between art as a human act that finds and makes meaning, and the productive projections by which the arts are often expected to provide objects that are valued, distributed and consumed. While as human practices the arts seek meaning critically through their acts of interrogation and disruption, the outcome of this criticality cannot be produced or replicated.
- *Art is generative and reflective:* The distinction between art as an act of *doing* and production as a manufacturing of objects that are distributed and consumed is best understood when we consider the arts as *generative* and *reflective* - as human acts that are immanent.
- *Generation and reflection are critical, not systemic:* Because of their non-systemic nature, generation and reflection articulate works of art as states of being and



understanding that might be arranged as a system externally, but which internally - immanently - defy any systemic expectation or teleological objective.

- *In art practice the end precedes the cause:* Because it is irreducible and autonomous, art practice never seeks to fulfil a cause by means of an end. As in logical thinking, what is often perceived as art's *end-objective* occurs before anything that appears to cause it. Artists may plan, sketch or even project a sequence to what they do. However, conceptually speaking, to do art remains inherently speculative. Thus, in artistic enquiry - which is also its practice - one must *find* before one begins to *search*.
- *Systems attributed to art are results, never aims:* This is also why there is no specific aim attributed to arts practice except that of doing art. If we are to attribute a 'system' to art, it is this anti-systemic disposition towards aims that externally appears as a result.
- *As autonomous acts, art, education and leadership converge through paradox; they are not predetermined:* The above sounds paradoxical because it is. The only way by which art, education and their subsequent articulations of leadership could converge is by means of a possibility where divergent and often completely distinct activities find the need to converge. There can be no determination to such

convergence, as this would kill off the agonistic possibilities that characterize both the arts and education.

- *Art's autonomy is found in its way of unlearning systems*: It is therefore imperative that for the paradoxical to be preserved, arts practice, as a *germ* and *project* marked by autonomy, is also manifest in its disposition to unlearn.
- *Art's anti-systemic pedagogies are articulated by paradox*: Unlearning is the hallmark of the anti-systemic disposition by which art leads us out - educes us - into a proper world. This world is ours and what we do in it (as *art*) is neither externalized nor simply produced for consumption. This paradox also prevents us from taking short cuts by the rules of market and political economies.
- *Beyond the anti-systemic, creativity is a misnomer*: While market economies require that the arts gain legitimation through their function, the anti-systemic possibilities of art begin to give us an insight into how creativity, in its autonomous disposition, interrogates and ultimately disrupts any attempt to coopt it into heteronomous forms of articulation.

- *Arts leadership is implicitly asymptotic*: For art's autonomy to affect a democratic polity, it must resist to simply become an antithetical function of resistance. As in the case of the historic roles by which art's resistance took an asymptotic character, in any context for arts leadership, the arts must retain their asymptotic relationship with the political and institutional spheres that continuously attempt to make of arts another function of instrumental reason.

### **Final remark**

I hope that this article raises more questions than answers. Given that arts practice is at the core of this discussion, my aim was to develop this essay pretty much as one would approach art-making. Instead of representing a detailed snapshot, I opted to bring together several events that I questioned against a set of arguments. My intention was to invite readers to appropriate the arguments presented by way of dispute and agreement, critique and reflection. If we can speak of aims or indeed central 'questions', here we have many, although one could say that this essay's principal objective was to suggest that one could never avoid the paradoxical and agonistic nature of arts leadership, which, as we say in common parlance, is neither here nor there.

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